EDINBURGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Reference Department

¶ THIS BOOK MUST NOT BE REMOVED, UNDER ANY PRETEXT, FROM THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT. INFRINGEMENT OF THIS RULE RENDERS THE OFFENDER LIABLE TO PROSECUTION.

WITHDRAWN

Before leaving the Library readers must return the books to one of the attendants at the issue desk, or they will be held responsible for them.

Readers are required to take care of the books. Writing or drawing with pen or pencil on any part of a book, or turning down the leaves, or cutting or mutilating them, will be treated as serious damage.

¶ CONVERSATION IN THE REFERENCE DEPARTMENT IS ANNOYING TO STUDENTS, AND IS NOT PERMITTED.

Class.	*Location.*	*Accession.*
XBR5349P		65014

THE REV. ROBERT PRIMROSE

PUBLISHED BY

JACKSON, WYLIE & CO., GLASGOW

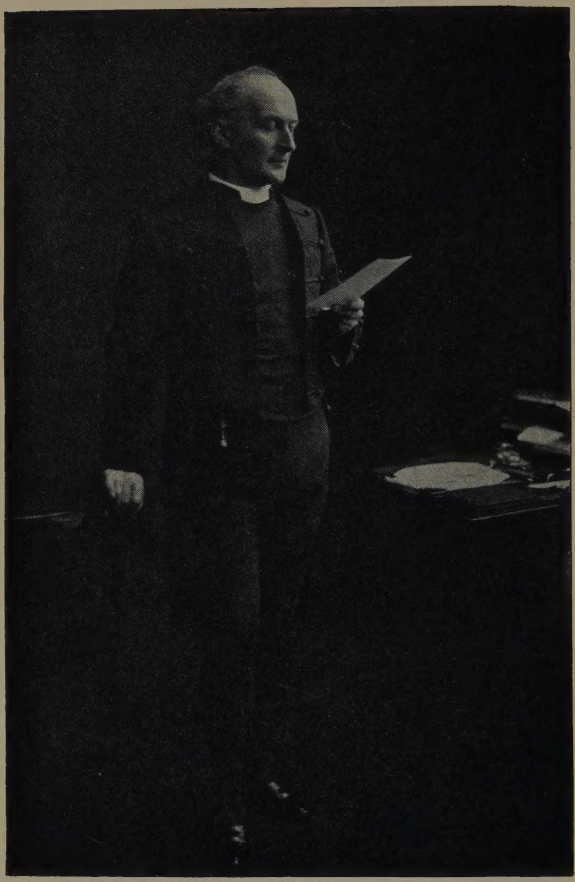
Publishers to the University

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, LTD.

Cambridge - - *Bowes and Bowes*
Oxford - - - *Basil Blackwell, Ltd.*
Edinburgh - - *Douglas and Foulis*
New York - - *The Macmillan Co.*
Toronto - - - *The Macmillan Co. of Canada*
Sydney - - - *Angus and Robertson*

MCMXXIX

EDINBURGH
LIBRARIES



CHAPLAIN THE REV. ROBERT PRIMROSE,
V.D., R.N.V.R.

THE REV.
ROBERT PRIMROSE

V.D., CHAPLAIN R.N.V.R.
PREACHER, LECTURER, PADRE & SAILOR

BY

J. H. LECKIE, D.D.

AUTHOR OF
REV. PROFESSOR D. W. FORREST, D.D.,' 'REV. FERGUS FERGUSON, D.D.'
'SECESSION MEMORIES,' 'THE VACATION OF THE CHURCH
'THE WORLD TO COME AND FINAL DESTINY,' ETC.

One man in his time plays many parts
AS YOU LIKE IT

GLASGOW
JACKSON, WYLIE AND CO.
PUBLISHERS TO THE UNIVERSITY
1929

EDINBURGH
LIBRARIES

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS GLASGOW

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	Introductory	1
II.	The Theological Student	15
III.	Ordination and First Charge at Cumbernauld	21
IV.	The Greenock Ministry	28
V.	The Ministry in Partick	36
VI.	The Burnbank Ministry	47
VII.	The Stirling Ministry	59
VIII.	Theory and Practice of Preaching	69
IX.	Years of War	81
X.	Last Years: Valparaiso; Bishopbriggs	106

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

Chaplain The Rev. Robert Primrose, V.D., R.N.V.R. - - - - *Frontispiece*

Chaplain Colonel The Rev. Robert Primrose, V.D. - - - - - 88

PREFACE

I SUPPOSE the subject of this memoir must be described as belonging to the "ordinary ministry." Indeed, all Presbyterian clergymen come under this designation, unless, of course, they be of those who, in modern fashion, are entitled "Very Reverend" and "Right Reverend," who are widely famous as preachers because they have published many volumes of popular sermons, or because they have attained eminence as Professors and Ecclesiastics.

Nevertheless, the ordinary ministry contains some quite unordinary men, and Robert Primrose was one of these. The record of his achievements shows this, and the testimony of all who knew him confirms it. His distinction did not lie in any one thing that he did or was, but in the extraordinary variety of his performance and in the especial way in which his personal qualities were

combined: in their relative proportions one to the other. Also, the entire personality was suffused by a light of hope and cheer, such as is rarely to be found in this grey world. It is this complexity of character and gift that renders the man so memorable and so difficult to commemorate, so hard to describe and so impossible to forget.

In the case of this volume, as of some earlier ones, I have to record my warm thanks to my friend, the Rev. D. H. Lawrence, D.D., for the great care with which he has read and revised the manuscript.

J. H. L.

January 30th, 1929.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

Robert Primrose was born at Glasgow in 1858, his people being of somewhat old Glasgow stock and one that has produced several distinguished citizens. Their connection with the city stretches far back, probably to the days when it was a beautiful little town, lying on the north bank of the Clyde, reaching down from the ancient Cathedral and University to the verge of the river, which was then an unpolluted stream of comparatively small width. Mrs. Primrose, Robert's mother, used to tell that when she was a child it was possible often to wade across the Clyde, just above the Broomielaw; also that the water then was rich in salmon, which were so plentiful, indeed, that domestic servants used to stipulate that they should be expected to dine on salmon not oftener than

once a week. This lady was able to describe, too, how people in her early days often went to Govan for a summer holiday; though they soon began to go further from home, seeking change, first at Bowling, then at places further down the stream, then venturing out to the shores of the Firth and gradually attaining the coasts of Argyll and the Islands of Bute, Arran, and Cumbrae. These last-named regions, now so familiar and so frequented, soon revealed the influence of city visitors by the development into flourishing modern towns of ancient communities like Dunoon and Rothesay, as well as by the appearance everywhere of fine houses wherein the richer inhabitants of Glasgow made for themselves pleasant provision for their summer days.

Such reminiscences as those of Mrs. Primrose indicated the swift growth of Glasgow, though for the most part they related to days after the Clyde had been deepened, and the sailing vessels that had formerly discharged their cargoes at Port-Glasgow were replaced by steamships which bore their burdens right up the river to the

Broomielaw. This rapid evolution was made possible by the energy and foresight that changed a narrow and shallow stream into a great waterway whereon fleets of merchantmen passed up and down carrying from and to the city a yearly increasing volume of commerce.

One does not readily associate Glasgow with romance and adventure, yet there is much of both in the story of the origin and rise of the western Scottish city. There is always appeal to the imagination in any record that reveals the varied powers of the human spirit, especially as displayed in a conflict with natural difficulties and in the surmounting of great obstacles. And so, there is imaginative appeal in the narrative of Glasgow's beginning and achievements in the realms alike of Science, Commerce, Literature, and Religion. There is romance in the memory of the days when the magnates of the American trade, commonly called the Tobacco Lords, were to be seen in their red robes going about the streets, as they awaited news of their clippers that were crossing the seas bearing a fragrant load; there is romance

in the thought that Adam Smith once taught in the University, as well as many other eminent men of later days like Lord Kelvin and the Cairds, that soldiers such as Sir John Moore and Sir Colin Campbell and poets like the author of "Ye Mariners of England" were born here. And there is romance, too, in the record of the amazing years that saw hosts of country people flocking into the city from every quarter to become its industrious citizens and to build up its fortunes. Nor can it be denied that there is cause for wonder in the work achieved by the great Clyde Trust in the deepening of the river and in the continual labour day by day and year by year whereby it has kept the waterway clear of encroaching sands, as well as in the erection and maintenance of the lofty lighthouses, which have rendered the entrance and navigation of the Firth safe for the crowding ships of all nations, as they bring from afar their "costly bales."

And this reference recalls the fact already mentioned, that Robert Primrose came of a race that has supplied to Glasgow some prominent citizens. His father, William

Primrose, was a successful merchant, who founded, and with his sons carried on, the Tradeston Flour Mills; and his eldest brother John became Lord Provost of the city and achieved a baronetcy in the reign of King Edward. His mother's maiden name was Annie Ure, she being a sister of Dr. John Ure, who presided over the Clyde Trust during the momentous years when the deepening of the river was undertaken and carried to a successful issue. Dr. John Ure also occupied at one time with great distinction the office of Lord Provost, and was noted for his general literary culture as well as for his eminence in civic life.

This honourable tradition was greatly enhanced by the career of Alexander Ure, son of Dr. John Ure, a man famous for his forensic ability and oratorical power, who became Lord-Advocate, and afterwards Lord-President of the Court of Session, finally receiving a peerage under the title of Lord Strathclyde.

It thus appears that Robert Primrose was one who, on both sides of the house, came of families that for generations were well-known

burghers of Glasgow, and played their part in the development of the city. In Church matters, both Ures and Primroses were Seceders, like so many other eminent citizens. The United Presbyterians formed the most numerous and influential of all the Glasgow religious bodies. This was so in Robert's early days and on to the year 1900 when they united with the Free Church; even as at this date they are about to take part in the re-union of the divided Scottish Kirk. When this latter has been consumated the ancient Cathedral of St. Mungo will surely become, as it used to be, one of the chief sanctuaries of our common national worship.

Such later ecclesiastical developments were, however, not dreamed of in the philosophy of Scotsmen when Robert was born. His father was a member of the United Presbyterian communion and was a most regular attender on religious ordinances. He had, nevertheless, no desire to see the end of the Establishment, and was a Conservative in politics. He was a man of most courteous bearing, and in business was reputed for his scrupulous uprightness of character. In his

family relations he was a most tender husband and father, though he ruled his sons and daughters with a firm hand. So far as his sons, including Robert, were concerned, it must be admitted that a strong government was necessary. They were all of a determined character and full of spirit, probably at times unruly enough. None of them could be described as especially bookish or remarkable for love of study. Certainly Robert was very far from being a boy who pored over his lessons or excelled in his classes. He felt his life in every limb and delighted in every kind of physical exercise. A former teacher of his writes that he remembers him "as a bright-faced, kindly boy with a shock of auburn hair; a restless, through-ither laddie, but lovable withal." As a youth he was very athletic, and once swam from the pier at Kirn to that at Innellan.

In this aquatic skill he resembled all his family; his brother Eben, for instance, achieved the feat of swimming across the Firth from the Gantocks to the Cloch; and William, who happily still lives, has per-

EDINBURGH LIBRARY

formed wonders in the waters at an age when most men have become lean and slippered pantaloons. Robert and most of his brothers were also far from being pacifists in practice, for they were all heroes of many fights in boyish days. In fact, Robert as a minister did not hesitate on occasion to support the cause of righteousness by the menace of physical coercion. One has heard him in later years express regret that he had not been more studious and less athletic in his youth; but he always recounted his early adventures like Scott's Edie Ochiltree, with a " mixture of glee and contrition." He had really little cause to regret this stirring element in his early career, for it helped to make his character the unusual and many-sided thing that it was.

Robert was originally intended for a commercial career, and with this in view, secured employment in a bank. He did not remain there long, however, for the desire to enter the ministry laid hold of him, and he became a student in Glasgow University as a preparation for his divinity course in the United Presbyterian Hall, Edinburgh. What led

to this change in the plan of his life does not appear. We do not hear of any spiritual crisis or sudden emotional conversion. The probability is that a strain of religious conviction was always part of his nature and that it gradually became a dominant force. For his own part, he used to attribute his choice of a ministerial life largely to the influence of his pastor, Dr. Joseph Leckie, who then was in charge of Ibrox United Presbyterian Church. Certainly Dr. Leckie's character and preaching were impressive and had an unusual power of leavening thought and of creating in young minds an interest in theological matters. Robert Primrose began early in youth to take notes of the sermons preached by his minister, a fact which indicates a marked degree of religious aptitude.

But, whatever may have been the decisive factor in determining his career, having put his hand to the plough he never looked back; and his course of training in university and college was completed within the usual number of years. Throughout it all, Dr. Leckie took the keenest interest in his progress; partly because he thought every minister

owed a peculiar duty to students of divinity, but mainly because he had a sincere liking for Robert. He admired the courage and energy of the youth, as well as his geniality and cordial, happy ways. During his university course Robert was in constant touch with his minister, whose supervision became much intensified as the time drew near when the student must seek admission to the Theological Hall. Robert, it must be confessed, was rather backward in his studies at this time, for his love of languages was rather small and his love of sport very great. Football, boating, and the like are good, but they occupy much time; and scholarship is an exacting mistress, jealous of hours given to other things. At any rate, as the entrance examination came to loom in sight our student had reason to be concerned as to his knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. The help of Dr. Leckie was, therefore, urgently required and was gladly given, for the minister's anxiety in the matter almost equalled that of the student.

There followed a course of daily tuition, which was not unattended with stormy pas-

sages. Dr. Leckie was a teacher of the old school, very insistent on accuracy as to grammar, and entertaining a horror of false quantities and other minor delinquencies on the part of a pupil. Robert, on his part, was apt to regard such things lightly, and was not always able to show cause why the day's task should be accounted to have been well done. Hence arose scenes in which "the Doctor" expressed his views with much vigour; the issue being that the student "stood not on the order of his going," but went. Robert used to say that on one occasion a book was thrown at his head. If this was so, we may be sure that the missile did not hit its mark, for the minister was not skilled in such exercises as the discharge of projectiles. But such crises in their relations were not common; and they did not matter, for Robert was not sensitive and his minister bore no ill-will. Each entertained for the other unchanged regard to the last, and Dr. Leckie often said that although Robert might not be a great scholar, he had qualities of heart and mind which must render him a most useful minister. The truth is that though Dr.

Leckie was a man of wide learning he had no academic narrowness, and was accustomed to maintain that the Church, in requiring a reasonably high level of scholarship in its ministers, must guard itself against a too rigid adherence to rule; lest haply in guarding good scholarship it should lose some good men: men of special endowments, who might want learning or the capacity and opportunity to acquire it, yet possessed humanity, quickness of mind, and the power of speaking directly and effectively to the people.

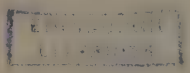
A rather amusing feature of these lessons was that Robert when he had engaged to play in a football match at a certain hour, and had reason to fear that his lesson might not be ended then, often arranged with a young friend to convey to him a signal when the hour had come. On receiving this signal, he immediately began to make many intentional blunders, which resulted as he had foreseen in his being hastily dismissed. No doubt his minister was left marvelling at the astonishing liability to lapses which his young friend sometimes displayed. It is to be remembered that at this time Robert was but

a youth, for he was only twenty-two years of age when he was ordained.

Of a similar kind is another story that is told of those days. His father was a man who held strict views as to ministerial dignity, being in this respect true to the tradition of the Seceders. Accordingly, when Robert became a divinity student he was forbidden to play football any more. His father was probably justified in this prohibition by the fact that his son often returned from a match with a discoloured face and blackened eyes. The danger of this leading to Robert having to preach bearing the marks of such unbecoming injuries was too great to be wisely incurred. But it is easier to issue a command than to have it obeyed; and the temptation to take part in the glorious strife of the football field was sometimes more than the youth could withstand. On one occasion he had arranged to play in a match when he learned with great concern that his father intended to be a spectator of the game on the appointed day. Thereupon he resorted to the desperate expedient of appearing on the field disguised. Afterwards, at the family

table, he listened with well-concealed glee to a warm paternal tribute to the prowess of "the wee fellow with the beard."

This account of early days and of the relations of the student with his minister may be reckoned too long; but so much must be said in faithfulness to truth and in justice to one of the strongest influences in Robert's youthful career. Certainly, Robert himself would not have wished that this reference to "the Doctor" should be omitted. He always spoke of Dr. Leckie with affection and was extremely generous in his expression of indebtedness for help, both in his student life and throughout the early years of his professional career. Dr. Leckie passed hence before Robert's ministry was far advanced, but not before he had seen cause to believe that his hopes as to the future of his young friend were being fulfilled.



CHAPTER II

THE THEOLOGICAL STUDENT

When Robert went to Edinburgh to study theology he bore with him introductions from his minister to two old friends, Dr. John Ker and Dr. Andrew Gardiner, both of whom showed him great kindness. Dr. Gardiner was a man of marked characteristics, large hearted, and an admirable scholar, who is remembered affectionately by all who knew him, and Robert owed him a great deal. Dr. John Ker, then Professor of Practical Training in the United Presbyterian Hall, had a singular gift of inspiring students and of creating in them a high sense of ministerial duty and of the rich opportunities afforded to any man who could exercise the art of preaching with sincerity, humanity, and genuine conviction. No man of his day knew better than Ker how to construct a

sermon, to illuminate its argument with apt illustration, and to bring its message home to the hearer. He had proved himself in practice a very great preacher and pastor, and this fact gave him an authority which was enforced by his strong and gentle character. There were other men in the Hall who exercised wide influence, as Principal John Cairns and Professor Duff. Robert Primrose was able to profit by the lectures of these teachers; for, if he was not a very close student, he had a remarkable gift of appreciating good work and of grasping the points of an argument. The only class, however, in which he distinguished himself was that of elocution, in which he gained the first prize.

This achievement indicated the sphere in which he was to be most successful, that of public speaking. In the early days his oratory was perhaps a little too exuberant, but the passing years gave it mellowness and richness of tone; and after all a man who is not exuberant in his youth is apt to be arid later on. In any case, it would always have been unfair to suggest that his elocution was artificial and even partly insincere. Dra-

matic and oratorical power was in fact a part of his inheritance, shared by many of his kindred. It was possessed in a marked degree by his brother, Sir John, and pre-eminently by his cousin, Lord Strathclyde. I have heard Strathclyde deliver a speech lasting more than two hours which was enunciated with such clearness and illustrated by such an astonishing variety of tone, gesture, and facial expression that it seemed no longer than many a discourse of half an hour's duration. Robert's brother, William, has in an emergency occupied a pulpit with general appreciation; and another brother, Alexander, has so many platform gifts that he was employed by the Canadian Government to encourage emigration by lecturing in this country on the attractions of the Dominion. It is fair, therefore, to suppose that the elocution of Robert Primrose was in the main a natural gift, though no doubt enriched and improved by care and practice. This view of the matter is supported by the memory that, even in private talk, what he said was so uttered as to secure attention; a gift this to be envied by many of us who have diffi-

culty in gaining and keeping the ear of any company exceeding in number the scriptural two or three.

It is interesting to note that Robert Primrose during his time in Edinburgh had for his fellow lodger Arthur Dewar, who was then pursuing his legal studies. These must have been prosecuted to some purpose; for he afterwards became a Judge of the Court of Session under the title of Lord Dewar. Men who have lodged together during student days have, as a rule, either developed an incompatibility of temper which has led to a rupture of relations, or else they have formed a lifelong friendship. The latter was the case in this instance; for among Primrose's papers we find a letter addressed by Dewar to Robert's fiancée on her engagement in which he says that he is " proud to call Robert Primrose his dearest friend " and that he is deeply grateful for the elevating influence which Robert had exercised upon him during the whole period of their acquaintance. He also acted as " best man " at Robert's wedding, and the second son of that marriage was named Arthur. Again, after a

great many years, Lord Dewar writes to Robert entreating his old friend to come and stay with him. It is to be hoped that his friend was able to do this, for the letter was written when Robert was home on leave during the war, and must therefore have been penned not long before Lord Dewar's death. At any rate, we find in the story of this friendship an illustration of Longfellow's saying, "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." Men who live to any considerable age learn to treasure these friendships with jealous care; for the world grows emptier of them as the years go by. Even Burns, whose life was not long, had reasons to write:

> "The auld frien's are the best frien's,
> And the maist o' mine hae left me."

When Primrose's theological career was ended he acted for a time as assistant to Dr. Andrew Gardiner, who evidently retained a kindly feeling for a young man on whom he had spent much labour in the effort to imbue him with a zeal for the study of Hebrew, a study which rarely inspires youthful enthusiasm. In those, however, men like Dr.

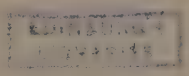
A. C. Welsh and Dr. McFadyen, whom it does thus inspire, it creates the enduring devotion which, no doubt, is its due as a venerable tongue and the organ of a great religious and poetic literature. Perhaps its failure to secure reasonable attention from the average man is largely due to the fact that it forms no part of his early education, and that the time devoted to it in his theological curriculum is not long enough for him to acquire the taste for it. Nor can we claim that Robert Primrose had ever any great love of it or skill in its interpretation.

When he was licensed as a preacher, however, he began to be a man of mark; for the pulpit was his true sphere, and public speech his predestined instrument. It is true that in later years he was accustomed to recall his early sermons with little satisfaction and some amusement, as well as with frank wonder that people had ever been willing to give them a hearing. Nevertheless, Robert was certainly a popular preacher from the first, and soon received a call, being ordained as pastor of Cumbernauld Church, after a short probation, in 1880.

CHAPTER III

THE CUMBERNAULD MINISTRY

CUMBERNAULD is a village ten miles to the north of Glasgow, surrounded by pleasant pastoral country, and one might suppose that life in such a place would be uneventful, unexciting, and even a little dull. But this was far from being the experience of Robert Primrose in his first charge. For he carried about with him a power of creating adventure and stir wherever he went; his ministerial career never wanted incident; the sea of his existence never remained for long quite calm; the path he trod was never quite level. Indeed, some of his most disturbing experiences, perhaps, occurred at Cumbernauld. The main cause of trouble was the emergence of a proposal to use unfermented wine at the Communion. Robert was at this time an almost fanatical advocate of total



abstinence; and so, when the question mentioned was raised, he threw the whole weight of his influence on the side of the suggested innovation. A controversy then began which caused some bitterness; and it must be confessed that the minister was not wholly wise in his conduct of matters. Congregations at that time were not accustomed to the idea of unfermented wine, and were apt to suspect the temperance party of assuming an air of moral and spiritual superiority. Besides, there existed a strong sentiment on the side of old custom and established practice. No doubt, also, local considerations and individual preferences played their part. Anyway, the ecclesiastical barometer soon indicated stormy weather. And the pilot steered his little vessel amid the winds and waves of faction with some of the glee which used to shine in his face when he stood at the tiller of a sailing boat, guiding it through a squall. We have heard of stirring passages in the course of this controversy; of anonymous letters received by the minister; of his once ejecting a visitor with some force through the door of the manse; of parties lying in wait

for him with intent to assault, and so on. Nor, as has been hinted, was he without blame in the matter. In those days, and indeed throughout life, he was impulsive and sometimes a little high-handed. It was, also, unwise of him, of course, to read anonymous letters from the pulpit and refer to the controversy in his sermons; and it is probable that he was sometimes unduly severe in his language. But, after the battle was over, little of bitterness remained, and among his warmest friends in later years, and those who hailed his success with most gladness, were some who had opposed him very strenuously in the controversy, the issue of which I do not know. This fact was creditable alike to minister and people. But Robert was always a clean fighter and bore no grudges; and though he might sometimes be unwise, he was rarely unforgiven; he made many friends and lost few. A man who knew him in one of his later charges was heard to say to one with whom he had been acquainted in Cumbernauld days, "Mr. Primrose does not care a d—— for anyone! But, of course, he does not need to care a d——." "But," re-

sponded the other, " I kent him when he did need to care a d——, and he did'na care a d——."

It is not to be supposed, however, that the ministry in Cumbernauld was a failure, for it was anything but that. Of course it is not possible to increase the membership of a congregation very markedly during a brief village ministry, but Robert certainly left the cause at Cumbernauld considerably strengthened; and he was greatly esteemed in the community. Also, his experience in his first charge was to his profit, teaching him much as to the true way of managing men. Another lesson that he learned was not to stir up strife in a congregation. In one of his later charges the question that had troubled him in Cumbernauld threatened to make its appearance; but he promptly told his Session that he would never be a party to that matter being mooted; if it were he would resign. It is a true saying that " the burnt bairn dreads the fire."

Early in his first ministry he met the young lady who became his wife; an attractive lady she was, of a singularly sweet

temper. Annie Smith was her name, and her family were well known in commercial life, her father being senior partner in the firm of Smith & Wellstood, iron manufacturers. Mr. Smith had a wide connection, through his business, both in this country and in America. His travellings to America were, no doubt, necessary, but they once led him into great peril; for the ship in which he sailed was lost in mid-Atlantic, and he floated in a box of some kind for days before he was picked up by a passing vessel, homeward bound. It is interesting, also, to recall that he was a friend of Jefferson Davis, who was President of the Southern Confederacy during its struggle for independence, and was at that time the object of bitter execration in the Northern States, as was evidenced in one of the marching songs of the Federal armies:

> "We'll hang Jeff. Davis on a sour apple tree
> When we go marching home."

Mr. Davis visited the Smiths more than once in later days; and they were much impressed by his courtesy and kindness as well as by his ability. Certainly, his letters to Mr.

Smith do not at all suggest the desperado, containing as they do many inquiries as to the well-being of his friend's family. For instance, he refers once to Annie, congratulating her on having gained prizes at school and, even more, on her willingness to surrender one of these to a schoolmate in less prosperous circumstances. Mr. Davis remarks that Annie in this showed qualities of more value than many prizes. Of course this reference is not strictly pertinent to our story, but there is always interest in any unprejudiced testimony as to a man like Jefferson Davis who had played a great part in momentous events and, through the supreme military genius of General Robert Lee, had come near to disrupting the American Union; who at least had not incurred the reproach implied in Montrose's lines:

> "He either fears his fate too much
> Or his deserts are small
> Who dares not put it to the touch
> To win or lose it all."

As I write these lines regarding Mr. Davis, I am reminded that I once heard Mr. Bennet

Burleigh, the great war correspondent, one of the most lion-like men I ever knew, say at a political meeting, in answer to a question: "Yes, I did fight on the Southern side during the American Civil War. The whole truth as to that great struggle has never been told to the British people. But I do not propose to discuss the matter now." We seemed to hear in the ringing and even defiant notes of Burleigh's voice the echo of old but unforgotten days of strife.

CHAPTER IV

THE GREENOCK MINISTRY

Robert Primrose's first congregation did not long enjoy his ministry, for in 1885 he accepted a call from St. Andrew's Square Church, Greenock, where he was inducted to the pastoral charge in the same year. When he departed from Cumbernauld he left behind him and carried with him happy memories, and the tradition of his ministry there still remains. Concerning his pastorate in Greenock I have little definite information, except that it was a prosperous one and that during its course Robert's preaching power greatly matured and his reputation became wider and more varied. We learn also that, while he was minister, the interior of St. Andrew's Square Church was renovated and ornamented with carved woodwork, and that an organ was introduced.

EDINBURGH
LIBRARIES

The congregational prosperity was further shown by the starting of new organisations, through which good work was done throughout the surrounding district.

It was while he remained in Greenock that he began the practice of lecturing occasionally on social subjects. These had always interested him, and he early perceived how closely they concerned the welfare of the Church and the preaching of the Gospel. In fact his sermons were rarely of a purely theological type and were always inspired by the "enthusiasm of humanity." The burden of his preaching was an endeavour to interpret life and its perplexities in the light of the spirit of Christ. Not that his teaching was in any way heretical. There was no negation in his addresses, which were always devout in tone and revealed a warm belief in the catholic creed of Christendom. All that may be truly said on this point is that he never was the strict adherent of any school of theology and that his mental outlook was free and broad. In like manner he was not bound to any political party. On certain questions he was a zealous reformer, and some may have

thought him a bit of a Socialist. But this was not so. His great hero was Thomas Carlyle, from whose writings he was accustomed to quote in the course of his lectures. Now, Carlyle often attacked with fiery pen the evils of his day, but he was so far from being a Socialist that he could hardly be called even a democrat; for the hope of humanity, in his view, lay not with the multitude but rested in a succession of great individuals through whom alone divine messages and impulses came to the world. In the same way Robert Primrose was extremely individualistic; although he was always ready to attack anything that seemed to him a social wrong, and in his attacks he did not weigh his words nor had any great regard for consequences.

There is, unfortunately, little to record concerning our friend's Greenock ministry, which seems to have had none of the stirring and eventful features that characterised his experience in Cumbernauld. There is no surviving member of his family old enough to remember clearly the years that were spent in the seaport town, but it is clear that he

left St. Andrew's Square in a much more flourishing state than that which it possessed when he began his ministry. Greenock, of course, gave more scope for his energies than Cumbernauld had done, and there he disciplined himself to habits of study which he retained in later years. He was by no means a man who trusted to the inspiration of the moment for the expression of his thoughts. Rather did he prepare for the pulpit with great toil and with much reading. We cannot doubt that he found many illustrations for his discourses in the magnificent outlook which Greenock enjoys. That town is often associated mainly with a plentiful rainfall, crowded docks, and an overhanging pall of smoke which helps to conceal from the voyager the beauties of the Clyde. But it really, especially in its western part, is a very charming place, looking across the Firth to a great succession of lochs and mountains. Walter Scott has testified that Caledonia is "a fit nurse for a poetic child"; and assuredly the estuary of the Clyde is a fit nurse for every sort of imaginative talent. Religion is akin to poetry, and not a few

preachers have received on these western shores many devotional impulses.

Certainly, Robert Primrose owed to Greenock things which enriched his entire life and helped to mould his ministerial career. It did this partly by direct influence upon his preaching and, more especially though not so immediately, by renewing and increasing his lifelong enthusiasm for the sea and for sailing. He had not been long resident in the port when he acquired possession of a new and beautifully-built little yacht which he called the *Cambria* in memory of the vessel that had rescued Mr. Smith when about to perish in the Atlantic. This was a craft that was calculated to involve its master in adventure, for although she was beautiful in build she was tricky in disposition. A delightful boat she was when the water was calm or when she lay at anchor. But no sooner was she set to sail in any considerable breeze than she revealed an amazing readiness to lie over on her side. This is a serious vice in a boat; for it much decreases her speed and greatly increases the danger of catastrophe. Many sudden squalls dart from

the Greenock shores and many more beset the opposite coast of Argyll, so that the reverend skipper experienced not a few most exciting moments aboard the *Cambria*. He was fond of physical dangers and delighted in a battle with wind and sea; but the *Cambria* provided too much adventure, even for him, and when he parted with her he felt no sadness of farewell. Nor did she amend her ways as years went by. The present writer made intimate acquaintance with her long after she had ceased to be a Primrose possession, and some weeks' experience of her led him to the unalterable conviction that she was not a craft to be desired by any man who liked a boat that could be trusted. Such a vessel, however, helps to develop the skill of a steersman, while it is quite unable to destroy the love of seamanship in anyone who owns the qualities needed in the management of a yacht. In any case, Robert emerged from all his adventures with unabated enthusiasm. He never indeed showed much interest in the *Cambria's* subsequent history. We might say that her " subsequent proceedings interested him no more "; but he sought and

found a better boat, and used always to spend his holidays by the shores of the Firth; his love for its waters constantly increased.

This delight in the western seas was, as I have already suggested, an element in his ministerial career; for it led to his becoming a chaplain in the Royal Naval Volunteers. In this force he acted first as junior to Principal Story, and after the death of that eminent man, as chief in charge of the religious oversight of this division of R.N.V.R. The Commander when Primrose became chaplain, and until the end of the war, was a nobleman who always showed him great kindness, then the Marquis of Graham, now the Duke of Montrose. The Commander at this time is Clifford Primrose, the son of the chaplain, who always, like all the family, has had a great affection for his father. A delightful incident of his early days illustrates this. Clifford was at the time but a small boy; old enough, however, to attend church. The pulpit on this particular Sunday was occupied by that truly great preacher, Dr. John Hunter, and Clifford, listening, was heard to murmur, "That man is just

trying to imitate our father." This is a story which the said father used to tell with much delight. In fact, he related it with glee to Dr. Hunter himself, who was vastly amused.

EDINBURGH LIBRARIES

CHAPTER V

THE MINISTRY IN PARTICK

The ministry at Greenock was ended by our friend's receiving and accepting a call from Partick East, Glasgow, to become colleague and successor to Mr. Gibson, a highly esteemed minister. This occurred in 1889. He then entered on the most laborious, and perhaps also the most successful, period of his career. The cause of which he now assumed charge was, for various reasons, not at this time prosperous. Perhaps indeed it was this fact that rendered it desirable in the eyes of this unusual minister. The idea of being pastor of a comfortable, prosperous, and wealthy congregation never attracted him. He loved to undertake a charge which was in need of help and sorely pressed; to take command of a retreating army and lead it to victory. In point of fact, every charge

of his throughout his career was, to begin with, in some degree of trouble. He found it in straits of a more or less discouraging kind, and forthwith set himself to establish and strengthen it. The slough of despond had no terrors for him. A church struggling in that slough he approached with joy, loving the task of pulling it out of its grievous plight and setting its feet on the solid ground. When that was accomplished, we must admit that his interest in it was apt to wane. His vocation was that of restoring waste places and making the desert to blossom as the rose. But to tend the rose when it had blossomed seemed to him a somewhat dull task. He liked to have a prospect before him and to carry up the hill a heavy load. This was the work that attracted him. Well! to every man his own task. The Church has surely need of many types of servant. She requires scholars, theologians, men like the late George Morrison, who can sustain and uphold, year after year, established congregations, keeping them in the way of increasing prosperity and making their pulpits centres of light and the homes of a great tradition. But she has need

also of men of the Robert Primrose type, whose gift it is to arrest decay, restore impaired vitality, gather in them that are without, and build again the fallen walls. There are diversities of gifts but the same spirit, just as there are many sorts of outlook and creed but the one faith, the one hope, and the one Master of all.

It was during his work in Partick that Robert Primrose lost his first wife, Annie Smith, whose sweet and quiet spirit had been his companion throughout his early ministry, who had supported him in the days when he was establishing his reputation; the seed that came to fruition after she was gone contained a good deal that she had helped to sow. How many a field shines golden in the autumn sunshine when brave hands that have helped to sow it have reached their final rest.

There can be no doubt that the few years spent in Partick East were years of strenuous and ceaseless activity. No one, however great his strength, can achieve what our friend did during this period without much expenditure of power. It is not light labour to tread hour after hour the dusty streets, to climb

many long stairs, and to maintain throughout an aspect of cheer and sympathy. But this man at least achieved it, and he was not content with this, for he gave much study to his pulpit and often lectured in the evening after conducting two full services. Yet he seldom bore any signs of fatigue and was always ready with encouragement and help. The fighting spirit also remained strong in him, and he, as before suggested, did not hesitate to enforce righteousness by threats and sometimes by actual use of muscular power. One day, for instance, he discovered in visiting a household that the head of the home inspired great terror in his unfortunate family and was even given to beating his wife. Thereupon he approached the offender with a stern and menacing face and told him if he ever heard again of such a thing he would come and administer a severe thrashing. The threat may not have been legal but it appears to have been effective, for the bully knew that this amazing minister would certainly keep his word.

On another occasion a man came to the door with a piteous story of abject poverty,

of a family starving and of the urgent need of help. Mr. Primrose was doubtful as to the truth of the tale, but he gave the beggar a shilling. Going down the street soon afterwards he spied this person, who, he observed, was strolling along the road displaying no sign of undue eagerness to return to his distressed family. The minister, keeping a vigilant eye upon him, shortly beheld the worthy turning aside into a public-house; nor did he hesitate to follow. Passing through the swing doors of the place, Robert was just in time to see his quarry lay down his shilling on the counter and receive in exchange a glass of whisky. "Oh!" thought Robert, "this is what is being done with my shilling. We'll see about that." The sequel was that the wastrel experienced the truth of the saying that "there is many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip." For as he was lifting up his glass, he suddenly saw to his horror a muscular hand appear from behind and snatch the shilling away. Turning quickly, he was confronted by his late benefactor, who proceeded to leave the scene without a word, but bearing his shilling with him. To be sure,

he also bore with him many maledictions; but these fell harmless on his retreating back. His Reverence did many such things, and enjoyed the doing of them. No doubt, some people would note, and might misunderstand, his exit from a liquor shop, but this would concern him not at all.

These incidents are recorded here because they illustrate the more picturesque and forceful side of Robert Primrose's ministry. But the gentler aspect of it must not be forgotten. This aspect cannot be set forth by anecdote, because it was a matter of which he spoke little. But a strong man is also a man capable of great tenderness and compassion; and many could bear witness to his kind deeds, his open hand, and his untiring service of the weak, the erring, and the disheartened. The evidence of this element was written on his face, kindly and cheerful as well as resolute. It is written also in the "fleshy tables" of the hearts which he encouraged and consoled. He was always ready with "comfort, counsel, and the words that make a man feel strong in speaking truth."

Reference has been made above to his lectures on social subjects; and it may be said here with simple truth that these were extremely well done. They were founded on careful personal investigation, involving the expenditure of much time and toil; they were expressed in virile, lucid English, and were delivered with sustained force, besides containing passages of genuine eloquence and passion. No wonder they attracted large audiences and held their attention from first to last. Nor was their appeal only popular. I have before me, for instance, a cordial letter which Mr. Primrose received from Dr. James Stalker, who had read in the newspapers a report of one of these social lectures. In this note Dr. Stalker urges him to have the address printed in full so that it may reach a wider audience. This letter is evidence that Robert Primrose was no mere rhetorician appealing only to the unlearned, but one whose qualities were appreciated by men of marked critical power and erudition, whose preaching and scholarship commanded universal respect. It is not reasonable to speak as though theological and literary accom-

plishments were the only things that required the exercise of mental qualities or implied great labour. Mr. Primrose's lectures were built on a sound foundation of careful research and toil. In investigating, for instance, the problems presented by the slum areas of Glasgow, the minister of Partick East had often to be escorted by the police as he went about the most wretched and dangerous parts of the city, in order that he might be able to speak of things that he had himself seen and observed; nor was it at small cost to heart and brain that the message founded on all this practical work was prepared and effectively delivered to the people. It may be added that in Mr. Primrose's lecturing, though there might occasionally be passionate excess, there was never any vulgarity or appeal to the prejudices of the mob. His bearing in the pulpit was always dignified and such as became one who never forgot that he was first of all a minister of religion.

When he left the congregation of Partick it had advanced in prosperity; its pews well filled, its membership much enlarged, its reputation extended, and its circumstances

such that it was about to erect a new and fine building. Nor had all he had accomplished or the personal sorrow he had experienced while in Partick done anything to make less manifest his courage, simplicity, and the spirit of service. It might have been expected that after his active years in Partick East he would have desired a less exacting sphere, at least one where he might from the beginning look down from his pulpit on the cheerful sight of well-filled pews. Surely he might have desired to embark on a ship that sailed the smiling waters of prosperity or to command a force that was flushed with victory. But, in truth, the congregation of Burnbank was somewhat like his other charges in that it was not in a very flourishing condition when he became its minister.

When his ministry in Partick ended, he was generally reckoned one of Glasgow's popular ministers. It may be well at this point, therefore, to consider the meaning of the term "a popular preacher." When we ask what its precise meaning is we are puzzled to find an answer. If we say that pulpit oratory is mainly a matter of voice and

gesture, we are reminded that John Hunter did not gesticulate, that Ambrose Shepherd had a very weak voice, that George Morrison seldom moved in the pulpit and was not always audible. If we choose to assert that popularity is seldom consistent with thoughtfulness, we are faced with the question: was John Caird, or John Cairns, or Joseph Parker, or Ward Beecher wanting in thoughtfulness? They were all princes among preachers, yet their discourses were, in various ways, burdened with a weight of reflection. Spurgeon, again, had a beautiful voice, but his thinking was not very impressive nor his appearance. What, then, constitutes popularity in a preacher? Who shall say! Pulpit power, like all kinds of oratory, is a mystery. "Personal magnetism," as it is called, is, doubtless, a part of its secret, so as a rule is voice, delivery, elocutionary art. But it does seem that an essential quality of it is personal force and the gift of saying things as though one meant them. Yet, when we have said all this, we have not achieved a complete answer to our question. There is something left unexplained. "Personal

power" is itself a mystery; and oratorical power is ultimately indefinable. It is a thing to be felt, but hardly to be analysed. There is no standard prescription for it. Many physically weak men, like Robert Hall, have possessed it, also men of defective speech. Its effect depends on the audience as well as on the speaker. It is of many kinds and varieties and degrees. Yet to find a formula that embraces all the facts about it passes ordinary wit. But, however you define it, Robert Primrose did possess it in an unusual measure. It is a precious, if perilous, gift; and in his case it was in large degree the expression of his character. It was a powerful help to him throughout his career, and not least, as we shall see, in the work he did while minister of Burnbank Church.

CHAPTER VI

THE BURNBANK MINISTRY

Burnbank Church is situated in the west end of Glasgow near to Kelvin Bridge. Mr. Pirret, to whom Robert Primrose became successor, was a man who was much respected and his ministry had been in earlier days very fruitful. In his time a spacious church building had been erected and the congregation had received its full share of the success which in those days of rapidly-increasing population had been enjoyed by many congregations in that district. Of later years, however, owing to circumstances which included the tendency of people to move always further and further west, the membership had been sorely depleted and Sunday attendances had become sparse. Burnbank, therefore, when its new minister was elected, presented much the same problem

as that which he had faced in other spheres. Indeed, the task which lay before him promised to be harder than ever; for a cause that has once been strong and has become weak is more difficult to invigorate than one that has never known success. But no difficulties, at that time or indeed at any time, daunted our friend, and he entered upon his labours in the west of Glasgow with the joyous confidence that always distinguished him.

Nor was he disappointed in the issue. Burnbank at once began to make headway; and its progress was so swift that anyone visiting it at short intervals could not fail to be impressed by the many signs he saw that the spirit of the people was being renewed and the blank spaces in its ranks being filled. Nor is this surprising, for Robert was now at the height of his powers, and these had been disciplined by the lessons of experience. The methods followed in the prosecution of his ministry remained unchanged. By his evening lectures he crowded the house and made Burnbank widely known; his preaching also was marked by the same care in prepara-

tion, the same width of sympathy, and also the same varied, fluent, and passionate delivery; and his pastoral work remained unremitting, cheerful, and understanding, imbued with the spirit of his marked personality. He went about the ways of western Glasgow buoyantly and, it must be said, with as little regard to convention as in Cumbernauld, in Greenock, and in Partick's somewhat monotonous streets. He became a well-known figure in the district, being noted for his striking appearance, his careful attire, his clean linen, his general smartness.

His deeply-rooted dislike of rigidness and ministerial affectation was, however, symbolised by the habit of never wearing ministerial garb except when on official duty. He used to tell how he once met the late Professor James Cooper when he was far from clerically clad, and how that most lovable of dignitaries tapped him on the chest on parting and said, in tones of gentle remonstrance: "But, my dear fellow, you know, you know; the uniform, the uniform." There is a great deal to be said for "the uniform," and Robert's dislike to wearing it was not due to any con-

sidered theory, for he rarely acted on abstract principle. Nevertheless, it was significant of an element in his character; an impatience of strict ordinance and restraining custom. He in general disliked to "live by rule," though in the pulpit he adhered closely to the reverent tradition of the fathers. His aversion to clerical mannerisms and assumptions amounted to contempt; and his oratory suggested in its sound the platform rather than the pulpit. His public prayers were impressive, brief, and direct, but they were not of the liturgical type: they uttered the wants and aspirations of the general consciousness, not because the man who uttered them had said to himself "I represent the people," but because he was of broad humanity and "felt with his kind."

It was during the Burnbank ministry that his reputation as a public speaker and lecturer reached its climax. Even his spacious church proved too small to accommodate those who desired to hear him. And he showed himself capable of attracting a crowd that filled St. Andrew's Hall. Also he made clear his ability to secure and hold attention

during the delivery of lectures averaging an hour in duration. Those who have been in the hall in question know what a feat this was; what a demand it made on the voice as well as on mental and emotional force. His ministerial brethren were ready to appreciate his power; and he, on his part, had a great respect for men who excelled in theology, literature, and learning. His closest friends among the clergy in Glasgow were eminent in scholarship as much as in pulpit power, such as Dr. A. C. Welch and Dr. D. M. Ross. Dr. John Hunter and Dr. Ambrose Shepherd were also among his intimates. Altogether, the days of the Burnbank ministry were rich days, full of the joy of life and service, of professional well-being and of valued friendship.

While he was at Burnbank he formed his second marriage, which proved in every way fortunate. Catherine Wingate secured the respect and warm liking of all Robert's friends and was as much beloved by members of his first family as by her own children. She exercised a strong and helpful influence through the happy days of his health and

success; and tenderly supported him during the time, still far off, when mortal sickness at last laid hold of him and the powers that had seemed inexhaustible suffered swift decay.

At this point we may relate an incident which we do not attach to any one of his charges; but it rather indicates a characteristic which he showed throughout all his ministry, that of permitting no unauthorised interference with him in the discharge of his office. He was sitting one Sunday in the vestry, where he was accustomed to spend the interval between morning and afternoon service. It happened that he had made intimation in the morning that the pulpit would be occupied next Sunday by a certain well-known preacher. Now this preacher held somewhat liberal views in theology; in fact his reputation as a heretic was co-extensive with his fame as an orator. And this general opinion regarding him had evidently caused some people in Robert's congregation to regard with anxiety the news that he was to address them next Sunday. For, shortly after our friend had been estab-

lished in the vestry, he heard a knock at the door, and there entered a number of gentlemen who had the appearance of a deputation. Being seated, they proceeded forthwith to explain that many people had been distressed to learn that Mr. So-and-So was to conduct the service on the following Sabbath. This theme they elaborated at some length. Their minister replied: "This, gentlemen, is a matter easily settled. There are several congregations in the district that will, no doubt, sympathise with your views; and I suggest that you might seek admission to one or other of these. But I give you warning that so long as I am minister of this church, Mr. So-and-So will always be welcome to my pulpit." Thus ended the first lesson in the doctrine of non-interference, which apparently proved sufficient. For no further objections were ever taken to Mr. Primrose's arrangements for the pulpit. Nor was any ill-will caused on one side or the other.

Throughout all the years of his Glasgow ministry and on to the end of his life Robert was, as already hinted, in the habit of spending his summer holiday in one place or

another on the shores of the Firth of Clyde. Strone, Sandbank, Ardentinny, Inverkip, Innellan, Colintraive, Tarbert, Kilchattan Bay, Port Bannatyne: all these in turn he visited, and his sailing boat, as well as his personality, became well known all along the coast. He gave proof of his physical power, notably on one occasion while he was minister of Burnbank. He arrived at Innellan, where he was to spend his weeks of rest, in a state of fatigue ; looking and feeling worn out after a strenuous winter's work. But his exhaustion was not of a common type; for the very next day he proceeded to spend the hours in driving into the shingle, with a sledge hammer, a series of stout stakes and erecting thereon a long stage which stretched down to the edge of the sea: this for the accommodation of his many boats. To the onlooker this performance did not suggest restfulness any more than does the spectacle of a smith labouring at his forge. But, indeed, Robert resembled Longfellow's blacksmith in that " the muscles of his brawny arms were strong as iron bands."

The main occupation of his holiday, apart

from swimming and fishing, was sailing a boat, which had for its able crew his own sons. The first successor of the *Cambria* was the *Ruby*, a 17-19 footer which carried enormous sails and was very swift. Aboard this smart craft he may be said to have haunted the waters of the Clyde during successive months of July. The Kyles of Bute, Loch Fyne, the coasts of Arran and Bute, of Cumbrae and Argyll were all witnesses of his passing sail; no water of that whole region but was cloven by his keel. It was a great life this; for sailing is a sport for *men*, fitted to develop the virtues of courage, vigilance, and swift decision. It is rich in variety and changing adventure. There are squalls to be encountered off Arran, in Loch Striven and elsewhere that may bring disaster to the unskilful or unwary. There are rocks to be avoided in Loch Fyne; there are narrows to be negotiated in the Kyles; there are everywhere boats to be met and raced; there are calms to be endured; there are regattas that provide exciting days; there is always the voice of the sea to be music in the ears, now gentle and soothing, now wild and fierce as

a battle-cry; there are memories that every season yields of many adventures, of reefing in a sudden squall, of gliding along lovely shores, of breathing with delight the sweet air as the boat creeps into harbour in the evening or in the darkness of a "stilly night."

All these delightful things the skipper and his sons knew in the happy days when they sailed the *Ruby* or its successor, *Ruby II.* This second *Ruby* was much larger than the first. She was a stout craft, built not for racing but for cruising. Nevertheless, she was sailed in many a regatta, often with success. She enjoyed a good time allowance in races; for the handicapping is carefully done by skilled yachtsmen and is generally fair, taking into account the uncertainties of wind and weather. One remembers well days when the *Ruby* passed the Commodore far astern of the first boat, yet saved her time and emerged in triumph. She had a reputation for this, insomuch that a yacht would sometimes get home well ahead of the fleet, yet would find the prize snatched from it, after apparent victory, by the redoubtable *Ruby*. Such a yacht might have reached her

moorings, when the eyes of her crew would still scan the seas for signs of the Primrose craft: "Where is that confounded *Ruby*?" And not seldom the white, high sides of the *Ruby* would be descried within a distance such as to cause well-founded anxiety. For, though Robert could be out-manœuvred, and his enthusiasm sometimes led him into danger of infringing rules, he was a very good all-round steersman, and was always a popular figure with the yachting fraternity. Those days on the Clyde proved their value for him and his sons in after years of grimmer strife; for they undoubtedly developed characteristics which served them in good stead during the war: in the apocalyptic years when there was constant menace everywhere, when the terrible four horses of Revelation were let loose upon the earth, when also were fulfilled the amazing visions of Tennyson, who had sung long before of

> "The standards of the peoples plunging through the thunder storm,
> The nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue."

What induced Robert Primrose to leave

Burnbank was never made clear, for the people there were warmly attached to him and the congregation was in the full tide of prosperity. It was about this time that Dr. A. R. McEwen said to me, "No one need attempt to disparage Robert Primrose or his work. He has laid a strong hold not only on his own congregation but upon the entire life of Glasgow." Why, then, did he leave the city? One can only surmise that he grew restless. Perhaps he was influenced by his tendency to feel that when he had built up a cause and had led it to a condition of permanent prosperity, his work in that sphere was done, and that he ought to seek "fresh woods and pastures new," where there should be room for the sowing of seed and the gathering of another harvest. In any case, he accepted in 1909 a call to the mother church of the Secession: Erskine, Stirling.

CHAPTER VII

THE STIRLING MINISTRY

Robert Primrose's decision to go to Stirling astonished and dismayed his friends. For Erskine congregation was in a state, at that time, which caused despair as to its future, even among those who knew best the glories of its past. It had been united by the Presbytery with another congregation in Stirling, and this union involved its leaving the old building, which was the home of a long tradition and of many sacred memories. And we can hardly wonder that there was a section of the people, numbering almost two hundred, who refused to leave the old church and insisted on carrying on the old cause.

Certainly, no criticism of those who brought about this union need be made; they, no doubt, acted for good reasons and after careful consideration. The ecclesias-

tical situation, indeed, justified them. For one thing, the building in which the congregation worshipped, though it had been reconstructed since the Secession days, was still essentially the same as that in which the great Ebenezer had ministered, and still contained his tomb. It stands in a magnificent position, overlooking the windings of the Forth and a far-flung expanse of fair fields and woodlands bounded by historic hills, but it had been found to have several disadvantages in modern eyes. For instance, it was situated on high ground, and the ascent to it was toilsome. Also, the population had drifted away from it, and people were no longer willing to expend energy in climbing, Sunday after Sunday, a steep hill in order to reach a sanctuary which had possessed a magic for past generations that was not felt by an age which had forgotten Erskine and cared little for Secession principles and traditions. Also, the congregation which Ebenezer had left in a condition of commanding strength and prestige had shown shortly after his death a deplorable tendency to split into parties; there had consequently been many breakings-

away from its fellowship, and a succession of these had weakened it very greatly. So that, from one cause and another, it had become somewhat feeble, and was showing such alarming signs of hastening decay that the Presbytery of Stirling had been glad to unite it with a neighbouring congregation, hoping that in this way its venerable history might be saved from ending ingloriously in complete collapse. The policy was no doubt a wise one; but it failed to reckon with certain elements of human nature or with the hidden power of a proud historic legend. Hence, as has been said, the appearance of a party, who were resolved to maintain the separate identity of Erskine Kirk and to secure for it a minister who might be able to restore its departed splendours and gather in its scattered people.

To this end it turned its thoughts to Robert Primrose, and gave him a call that might have been described as an S.O.S. The wonder is, not that the congregation of Erskine issued this call, but that the minister of Burnbank accepted it. Nevertheless, it was so; and thus one bitterly cold day, to-

wards the end of October, many of us, his old friends, journeyed to Stirling to see Robert launched on his new venture. It is doubtful if many of us did so with much real hopefulness. He had undertaken many difficult tasks, but surely none so unpromising as this; he had turned back several ebbing tides, but none that ran so hard and strong as that which opposed the cause of Erskine Church. He had sown and reaped in some discouraging fields, but certainly in none that gave so little promise of fertility as this on Stirling's rock. But if any of us entertained such fears we were soon made to see the truth of the saying: "If hopes were dupes, fears may be liars."

Robert, it is true, was now fifty years old, an age probably near to that of Macbeth when he said, "My way of life is fall'n into the sere and yellow leaf." But he went on pursuing the old methods; preaching with earnestness and effect, so that he caused the historic church to renew something of its youth; making the building to be redecorated and an organ to be introduced; lecturing on the burning questions of the time in such a

way as to attract crowds and to cause fiery controversy; increasing the membership in a few years from 200 to 450.

It must not be supposed, however, that only public affairs or congregational matters were able to stir this minister to vigorous action. When his attention was directed to personal troubles and wrongs he was always quick to render what help he could, to interpose a strong arm in protection of the weak. An instance of this may be given, though it is not connected with Stirling, nor am I aware of the name or identity of any of the parties that figure in it. There were among his neighbours, somewhere, two maiden ladies, sisters, the younger of whom was of a disposition calculated to render her the easy prey of the unscrupulous. And in due time an unscrupulous one assailed this home, a designing man intent on gathering gear by every wile whether "justified by honour" or no. This person so ingratiated himself with the younger lady that he became a constant visitor at the house and finally established himself as almost an inmate of it. The elder lady was greatly concerned; for she suspected

matrimonial designs upon her sister. She accordingly laid the case before Mr. Primrose, who was quick to see the danger and to take measures for its prevention. He called upon a brother clergyman who happened to be acquainted with the past career of the scheming Mr. X. and knew certain facts, greatly to the man's discredit. The issue was that this clergyman accompanied Robert in a call at the house of the ladies, where they together asked for an interview with Mr. X. That person in due course appeared, and made many professions of gladness to receive the visitors. But Robert cut him short by turning to his brother minister and saying, "Now, A——, tell him his character." This request produced from the other a full and particular account of the past history and present character of Mr. X. "I must say," said Robert afterwards, "that A—— spoke up like a man." After the statement was ended silence ensued, there being nothing to be said. Then Robert turned to X., saying, "Go upstairs, sir, and pack your bag. My car is at the door, and we will drive you away from this." And it

was so. X. shortly appeared with his bag, was handed into Robert's little car, driven for a few miles, then set down to go whither he would, with the parting injunction, "Never let us see your face again"; and this ended the matter. Robert returned home rejoicing; and the ladies whom he had rescued were troubled no more. Which all goes to show that though force may be no remedy, moral indignation is none the worse of having force to back it. If we are inclined to be critical of such exploits, we must remember that, after all, the methods used by our friend sometimes were after the manner of the pilgrim Greatheart and of Valiant for Truth, concerning the latter of whom Bunyan tells us that when he crossed the river "all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

But Robert Primrose was yet to hear the sound of real trumpets; for his ministry in Stirling, which had already achieved much, was promising yet better things to come, when the outbreak of war cut it short. As Chaplain of the R.N.V.R. he was, of course, summoned to the colours; and so had no choice but to take the step which he would

have taken in any case, to leave his charge and accompany his division to Belgium.

Thus it came to pass that the vast convulsion which engulfed so many great ships of State and overthrew so many ancient dynasties affected even quiet Stirling and altered the entire course of our friend's career. For when he returned to Scotland on his first considerable period of leave, he soon decided that in fairness to the congregation, and in view of his resolve to continue with the Forces throughout the entire war, it was as well that he should finally sever his connection with Stirling. He accordingly resigned the charge of Erskine Church, and devoted himself with undivided heart to the extremely congenial service of the men in blue and khaki; these he had learned to hold in the highest admiration and affection. During his times of leave in the earlier years of the war he several times accompanied the Marquis of Graham on recruiting campaigns throughout Scotland, which were not without incident and adventure, and in fact wanted no desirable quality except restfulness.

At this point we may pause to note that

Robert Primrose had made full proof of his ministry; had shown his capacity to overcome the difficulties of five distinct types of place and people. He had served with distinction, first in a village, then in a busy seaport, then in an outlying district of a great city, then in the western residential part of that city, and finally in an ancient county town. Each of these spheres possesses its own clearly-marked features and its special problems for a clergyman. A man might well succeed in a village yet fail in a commercial town, might prosper in a town yet achieve little in such a place as Partick, might not be found wanting in Partick yet miss fire in the west of Glasgow, might succeed in all these and still suffer complete bewilderment when required to serve in a county town, which is a community differing essentially from every other kind of society whatsoever, whether village, town, or city. Yet in all these Robert had incontestably shown an entire competence, adapting himself readily to differing conditions and showing everywhere a quite notable power of overcoming difficulties, of snatching victory out of the

very jaws of defeat, and of reviving and sustaining failing concerns. Also, he had achieved much social work, serving in this the whole community and the entire Church, while fulfilling his duty as a pastor, and securing the personal affection of all sorts and conditions of men. In saying this we are adhering to plain truth, and asserting nothing that cannot be established by statistics and by the testimony of many witnesses. It was therefore with a well-attested record of honourable ministry that Robert Primrose left Stirling, and exchanged the laborious work of minister, pastor, and lecturer for the certainly not less exacting one of a Chaplain to the Forces in time of war.

CHAPTER VIII

THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PREACHING

Before going on to tell of Mr. Primrose's war experiences and last days, it may be well to interpolate a short account of an ordination address, delivered apparently while he was in Stirling. This address is not only characteristic in itself, but seems to illustrate better than mere description or anecdote can do the speaker's ideals of ministerial service, as well as the virile and direct style in which he was accustomed to express himself. One would gladly print the address in full, but this is rendered impossible by the fact that the manuscript, according to Mr. Primrose's practice, is not complete. It was his habit to write out carefully the greater part of a discourse, but to leave connections of thought, and certain passages, unwritten: trusting to

supply these in such language as might suggest itself to him during delivery. This is, no doubt, an excellent method, lending itself to freedom and variety of speech, but it presents difficulties to an editor who fears to misrepresent the author by the introduction of sentences and paragraphs which must be largely conjectural. Such interpolations are especially liable to error when the editor's own style and modes of thought are somewhat different from those of the speaker.

Mr. Primrose took for his text on this occasion a saying which occurs in the Second Epistle to Timothy, ii. 15, "A workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," and it opened with a definition of a *workman*. "You are called to be a workman, not a mere scholar or thinker or dreamer, not an explorer or speculator, but one who has found his work and knows it. You are to have a delight in work; for you belong to a Saviour who wrought hard and earnestly and has left us this saying, 'I must work the work of Him that sent me.' Our God delights in work. All creation attests it; and Jesus said, 'My Father worketh

hitherto and I work.' We know we are called to work with Him in His very highest work, that of bringing souls to Him. You have been ordained to a work, the greatness and momentousness of which will grow upon you the longer you live.

"Those who have been many years in the work waken up to a sense of what it means now and again, and the feeling is sometimes overwhelming. Always it comes back with painful wonder and surprise that a task so tremendous should have been laid on man. There is a trembling that one has in beginning, but I cannot hold out hopes to you that this will wear away. You cannot always be under this feeling, that would be against human nature, but it will always be there latent and always ready to rise and weigh upon you to oppression. It is this which makes welcome the promises of Divine strength that abound in the Bible, which makes them more than welcome, an urgent necessity, for the burdened spirit. There will be many a time when to get hold of some word of promise will be the chasing away of clouds from your sky and will be like a new lease of life to you.

Just think what it is to be appointed to speak to men at least once a week on the very weightiest matters, to represent God and Christ to men, and reason and plead with them on things of daily pressing and eternal importance. Think that you have to expound the Bible and apply it to the consciences of young and old. Think how intricate and changing the heart is, think of the cares and sorrows and sins, the struggles and temptations of those you speak to. Think what an effect your utterances may have on these hearts. What an opportunity a minister has! Men are gathered together for the worship of God. They are quiet and still, their minds are in the most impressible condition. They have sung psalms. Their spirit has been raised; a certain fervour is glowing in many a breast. The words and the melody have stirred the pathos and the longing of the soul. The tide is rising; now is the time for a word spoken on behalf of God and better things. Shall that word be spoken? Shall there be nothing to meet the wants of these souls? Shall this door of entrance be entered or not?

THE WORD AND WORDS

"Our material is given us; we have not to seek it: it is a word of life. No other workman has such material; we are workers in words that carry eternal life to men. Words have been often heavily freighted with thought and passion, but the words of the Gospel carry salvation and immortal joy. We may well wonder that frail words should be capable of such a burden. You will notice that in this passage the singular number is employed; elsewhere the plural is used, 'the words of life,' 'all the words of life.' The word of life is both one and manifold, and we require to keep both sides in view. If it is not one word to us we shall not use it to much effect. We must see its unity if we are to wield its power: for the Bible is not a collection of fine sayings, but essentially just one message, one word. But this unity embraces great variety, and we never can be fair to the truth unless we remember this and resolutely set ourselves to utter *all* the words of life, though some may be greater favourites with ourselves and our

hearers than others; the words of life are words of doctrine, reproof, consolation, warning, welcome, persuasion, and we must take great heed not to neglect any one aspect. If we do, we to that extent hinder the flow of life. It is not easy to see how anyone can make sure of presenting the many-sidedness of the truth unless he goes regularly and continuously through some book of Scripture.

NEED OF THOUGHTFULNESS

"One must also have a thread of thought to hang the words on. Their effectiveness will depend on the strength and tension of the thread. It is merely to misrepresent the word if one goes on adding passage to passage by the mere tie of sound; it were far better to read to the people a chapter of the Bible where the words are in their original unspoiled connection. And this thread of thought requires to have a thread of feeling intertwined with it. Surely words of life should put feeling into the thread of thought that unites them and thus make even the thread a living thing. Words of life on a

thread of idea that is alive with their life, this is certainly the best kind of preaching. If the thread is living it does not need to be very strong, it may be slender as a spider's web, if only it be thread, if only it be alive with heart and soul. Multitudes of souls may be drawn to Christ and drawn on through this world to heaven by a very thin thread of thought that is all life. But we should never make the thread slender when we can help it. Strong thinking, let people say what they will, is a good thing. Words of life are far better strung on a strong, well-twisted thread. It suits them better, for they are weighty words. It is the burden of the word of the Lord who made heaven and earth and formed the spirit of man. Let us not lose our confidence in thought. With our reverence for the word of life in its simplicity let there never mingle one grain of morbidness. Let us, as we love God and man: let us, for Christ's sake, hate sickliness and feebleness. Our business is to string the words of life on the strongest living thread we can.

DIRECTNESS

"Another element that has been amply attested is directness, addressing men, speaking to them, talking to them and not merely discoursing in their presence. We are often too literary; not often too thoughtful, but too literary and academical, too like a book, too intent on having balanced sentences and stately periods; instead of speaking to the people as if we really wanted to enlighten every one just there and then and to convince, persuade, and stimulate every one just there and then. We get too much into the way of thinking of deferred results; we make too much of what Solomon says about finding after many days. We forget that the best way to find after many days is to seek and expect this day and to-morrow. We almost wonder at the conversion of a soul from our labours. It takes ourselves by surprise as much as anybody. All this would be changed if matters were right with us. We should preach in expectation of results, and be disappointed, grieved without them. The whole matter of adaptation to the time

in which we live comes up in this connection. There are few things that require more consideration than this question of adaption to our own day. It would appear as if it would be an easy thing, and that a man who had a real hold of the old truth and was also a man of his own time would naturally make the two meet. But it really is not so. We all inherit modes that keep us from effectiveness. We are not expansive enough and do not come into possession of ourselves: our education, with all its advantages, often keeps us in and narrows us, instead of bringing us out into healthy self-reliance; and the result is that we often think of form and neatness and polish when we should be thinking of substance and force. Every channel of human action is apt to be choked by usage, and the pulpit not least. The very feeling of sacredness begets an indiscriminate regard for authenticated ways of procedure. Religion, as a part of human life, while in some aspects even revolutionary, tends to stamp with permanence all in its own immediate sphere of words and forms. It hallows and almost immortalises details and modes which ought

to change with time. Even the tones of voice become conventional and authorised. The effect of all this is freezing and deadening. Worst of all, unreality supervenes.

SENSATIONALISM

"There may be some danger, in trying to arrest the attention of an age like this, of falling into sensationalism; some, but very little. Where are the sensational or exciting preachers among us? Able, earnest, eloquent men we have not a few. But nobody is too exciting. People are not being unduly startled. Our danger still is in the direction of smooth things that cannot stick and respectable preaching which people approve, and forget.

TEXTUAL PREACHING

"As to your preaching, I would counsel you earnestly to adopt the textual and expository mode. It is at once the deepest, the freshest, and the simplest. Stick to your text, and do not be drawn away into generalities either by love of consistency or by the insidious love of ease.

ANECDOTES

" Everybody knows that there is not anything that more readily slides into abuse than the use of anecdotes in the pulpit. But the complete aversion that some have to this is indefensible on any ground whatever. A concrete piece of human experience, a little crumb from the vast mass of man's real life, may by its simple reality or its pathos have a great and lasting effect and may besides unfold wide meanings. Why should illustrations drawn from nature be approved, and facts from human life be ignored? If one finds a really good illustration from life he should rejoice over it, and make haste to use it before it escapes him; and the more anyone tends to discuss principles and explore ideas, the more should he welcome such bits of the actual as counterbalance and aid to his abstractions. A piece of genuine concrete embodied in the abstract is like a star flashing out on the bosom of space."

PREACHING CHRIST

After commending the habit of textual exposition and of pastoral visiting, Mr. Primrose went on to urge the preaching of Christ. "You are to preach Christ and Him crucified; the real Christ portrayed in the Gospels, and the meaning and purpose and work of Christ as displayed in the Epistles. Stand firmly and fervently by both of these. Neither is itself without the other. In preaching thus, of course, you will have your own bent and way. Bring out whatever is in you, and don't be afraid. Bring out your poetry and pathos and knowledge of men and science and your common sense and your philosophy —bring it all out for the sake of God and man. The world needs it all. It takes all to preach Christ."

CHAPTER IX

YEARS OF WAR

We look upon the war now as upon a vast tragedy, never we hope to be repeated, never willingly to be faced again. Yet undoubtedly many of our men obeyed the call to service with a kind of gladness and even exultation. The summons was a bugle-call that set the wild echoes flying in countless hearts, echoes of heroic voices out of the long ago, appealing to latent instinct inherited from the martial past. Tennyson speaks of "the wild pulsation that I felt before the strife"; and that wild pulsation was experienced by those who went forth in confidence to cross the seas and face the German onset. They were setting out to a new life and to "dare as dared their fathers." They were bursting the bonds of old custom, and about to encounter things that they had often heard of but had never

expected to find in their own experience. And they thought it a gladsome thing.

It is true that in very many cases this first joyousness died away, withered by the touch of grim and stark experience. But one has known of some with whom it was not so. I remember a man of a fine spirit who was killed after a year of fighting, witnessing just before he met with death that the time of military service had been the happiest time of his life. One remembers also meeting a Canadian soldier to whom had occurred almost every calamity that war can inflict: long separation from wife and children, sickness, wounds, disablement. When this man was asked, "Would you go through it all again if the old call came?" his unhesitating answer was, "Yes; we had our bad times but also our good times; and anyway I would face it all again." Robert Primrose was somewhat of this kind. It was with real joy that he accompanied his Division to Belgium, and he returned home again with spirit quite unchastened and with no regrets. He was now well over fifty years of age and might have been expected to have lost the

resilience and combativeness of youth. Nevertheless, it was as I have said. It is true that he served as a chaplain, not as a fighting man; but he was constantly in imminent peril and exposed to fire in Belgium, in France, Egypt, and on the shell-swept shore of Gallipoli. It was not in him to play for safety, or allow his cloth to excuse evasion of danger. Nor could one ever extract from him any confession that there was terror in shells or anything repulsive in wounds and disease. As he had done his work with gladness in times of peace, so he fulfilled his duty among the men in the trench and in the hospital, not with grim determination but with a bright face and a cheery word.

From this point onwards I shall often refer to Mr. Primrose as the Padre. This is the designation by which he was commonly known to his comrades of the Naval Division, and among yachtsmen after the war; and its use will tend to that variety of wording which is so much to be desired by any writer. The Padre's first experience of war was in the defence of Antwerp; for the Naval

Division was sent to that city (no other British troops being there) in order to delay as long as possible the tremendous advance of the German hosts. No doubt, this step was taken by the authorities for good reasons; since the proportion of the British Expeditionary Force that was available for the attempt to prolong the siege of Antwerp was very small; but the adventure cost the R.N.V.R. the loss of many men; since a large body of them went astray somehow in the retreat from the city and were forced across the border into Holland, where they were promptly disarmed, and interned throughout the whole war. Fortunate it was that the Padre did not share this fate. For what could have been more trying to his temperament than to be constrained to inactivity and uselessness, while his comrades and his sons were taking part in great events; to spend inglorious years amid the tame and domestic flats of Holland while the tide of war swept to and fro in France and Flanders and on the stormy steeps of Gallipoli? We can hardly think of the Padre suffering with patience such a trial. He would perhaps have

been shot in an attempt to cross the frontier or been imprisoned for addressing insulting remarks to his jailors. Certainly his feelings would have rivalled those of the ancient Israelites who pined by Babel's streams and wept when they remembered Zion.

But, as already said, he escaped this ordeal and remained with the troops unhurt so long as the defence of Antwerp continued. The experience was a testing one, for most of the men were making their first acquaintance with actual war, having a foretaste of its grim realities and learning the power of the enemy, which was then possessed of overwhelming superiority in numbers and equipment. The Padre used to tell how he walked about the city the first night after arrival and watched the German shells bursting, sometimes in the open streets. It was a thrilling sight even in those days, though but a faint foreshadowing of what was to be seen later in Flanders and France and in the East.

This was not the Padre's first sight of war, since he had been given a tour in Egypt and Palestine in 1880, and had then witnessed a charge of Dervishes and a counter-charge of

the British forces. This he used to describe in the old days as the most thrilling spectacle he had ever seen. But this Antwerp experience was war after another fashion. The corps to which he was attached was stationed six miles outside of the city, where it had established itself in trenches. The chaplain is not usually supposed to be allowed into the trenches, but Chaplain Primrose seems to have been admitted there; for he told how the man standing next to him in the trench was found to be a German spy, whose end was swift destruction. Two other spies he encountered at Antwerp who were caught signalling to the enemy, with a like result. So that, altogether, our Padre's experience in the defence of Antwerp was memorable enough. That defence, however, did not last long, though the retreat was ordered at the last possible moment. A confused and wild business it was; a mad scramble into the motors, and a breathless rush to Ostend. The Padre was among the latest to escape, and he made the entire passage to the Belgian port lying on the foot-board of a car which was the last of all to get away.

The Padre was at home for a short space after this, and no one could discern that the Antwerp adventure had injured him in any way. He was, in fact, intoxicated with the joy of his new service; and was, like most of us at that time, confident that the war would be short and would be crowned with victory. He said, however, that should the struggle prove to be long, he would continue with the forces to the end, even though his doing so were to involve his resignation of the Stirling charge. And in saying this he was simply foreshadowing what occurred not long afterwards.

His leave at this period was, as already indicated, short. It was, indeed, not so long as had been expected; this curtailment being due to military necessity, and especially to changes in the character of the Royal Naval Reserve. For this Division had been greatly enlarged and had, for the time, ceased to be naval in character, though it resumed that character later. Its central place of training was now the Crystal Palace, London, where it was being transformed into a land force, designed for foreign service. It therefore

had become necessary for the Padre to be recalled from his furlough and to take charge of the men at the Crystal Palace during the period of transformation and intensive training. After a brief period, however, the Division and its chaplain were removed from London to Blanford, where this "intensive training" was carried on with renewed vigour, with a view to immediate service in the East. At Blanford, Padre Primrose was attached, for messing purposes, to the Nelson Battalion, of which his son Clifford was then second, soon afterwards first, in command. The Chaplain, also, took now a higher rank, with the military title of Colonel, being Chief Chaplain of the whole Division. The Division remained in this camp for some months, and there is evidence that the Padre was greatly respected, and exerted much influence there.

At length the Division left Blanford and was embarked for a destination unknown. It proceeded to Alexandria in Egypt and was thence despatched to the island of Mudros, adjacent to Gallipoli, the intention then being to make an immediate landing on the Penin-

CHAPLAIN COLONEL THE REV. ROBERT PRIMROSE, V.D.

sula. But the designs of the authorities altered, and the much-travelled Division accordingly embarked again and went back to Egypt, landing at Port Said, where its wanderings seemed to be ended. The Nelson Battalion was, however, detached here from the main body and sent to Kantara, which was situated on the Suez Canal, midway between Port Said and Ismalia. At Ismalia it took over from Ghurkha regiments, charged with the task of holding the Canal against desultory Turkish fire. This by-adventure ended, however, after a time, and the Nelson Battalion rejoined the Naval Division which was soon to be sent to Gallipoli. Before this expedition to Gallipoli started, however, we hear that Colonel Primrose, with his son Clifford, obtained a short leave and visited together many of the scenes which the Padre had known in 1880-81. Among them was the place where Mr. Primrose had witnessed the Dervish attack and its repulse by the British troops. These years had seen many changes, much work, and many losses as well as enrichments. But the Colonel Primrose who now

looked again upon the pyramids and saw again the scenes of many memories, was the same in heart and courage as the young minister of old days, and he must have had great joy in accompanying his son over the fields "traversed so oft in life's morning march when his bosom was young."

While the Division was in Egypt an incident occurred which is too characteristic to be omitted, though it must be understood that in telling it one is suggesting no criticism whatever of any who were actors in it. The Padre himself never referred to the occurrence except with entire good humour. Among the chaplains subordinate to him he had some who were clergymen of the Church of England. One of these, with whom he was very friendly, invited him once to preach for him on a certain Sunday; this gentleman being incumbent of a church in the district. This invitation the Padre accepted, on the understanding that he should deliver a sermon in his accustomed style and that nothing in the service should be derogatory to him as a Presbyterian minister and a senior officer. This was agreed to with cordiality,

and on the appointed day Colonel Primrose proceeded to the church according to arrangement. When he entered the vestry, however, he found the minister awaiting him there, accompanied by several others of his Episcopalian brethren; and he was conscious at once that there was something in the atmosphere that was chilly though not discourteous. Evidently an influence had been at work hostile to the idea of a Presbyterian occupying an Episcopalian pulpit, and the Padre resolved to be on his guard. Nor was his impression unfounded, as soon appeared. He was taken into the church in order that he might see the arrangements that had been made for him; and he noticed at once that he was evidently expected to speak from the reading desk which stood on the platform; for he saw his Bible placed there instead of in the pulpit. His attention was directed to this, and it was explained to him that he was expected to preach from the desk as it would be easier to make himself heard there than if he spoke from the higher place from which a minister usually addressed the congregation. It was hoped that he would not object. To

this he replied only by saying, " All right; I shall preach in the position most convenient to me."

No doubt, a man who was accustomed to address large audiences in spacious buildings was a little amused by this solicitude as to his being heard in that small English church. But he maintained silence, and was quiescent throughout the reading of the prayers and the singing of the hymns. When the time came for him to do his part, however, he created some little sensation; for he lifted up the Bible from the desk and, turning, bore it up the pulpit stair, and proceeded with his discourse in his usual manner. After the service was over, the minister of the church and his friends remonstrated with him. But his reply was conclusive: " That will do you. I said I would preach in the position most convenient for me, and I have done so." Outside the building, he was met and warmly congratulated by a General and other officers who had been among the audience. " Well done, Padre. But what will the reverend gentlemen do now ? How will they contrive to cleanse the pulpit of its

Presbyterian taint?" This General and some of his officers were themselves Episcopalians; but they were pleased to see that the Scotsman could protect himself so well.

But it was not left to chaplains, during this campaign, to show the stuff of which Scotsmen were made or to indicate their power to hold their own. All the fields of war illustrated these qualities; not least the Gallipoli adventure. For to Gallipoli, after a short period, the Naval Division proceeded. The Padre was present with it during the hazardous original landing at Anzac Beach; and thereafter at Cape Hellas. He was constantly at work among the men, on whom his gallant optimism had by general testimony a highly tonic effect. Many toilsome days he spent with the ambulance corps conveying wounded men and carrying provisions between the boats and the trenches; these provisions including rum. The administration of the latter he always held to be a work of mercy, since the spirit, though it may not have stimulated the men, dulled the sharp edge of danger and helped to render tolerable an almost unendurable strain. This

laborious service may not appear to some as becoming a chaplain. But the Padre was never anxious to preserve his dignity, and for that reason perhaps preserved it all the better. For it is certain that the men held him in much respect as well as affection.

It must not be forgotten that the passage 'twixt trenches and boats was a perilous business; for the enemy's fire was very deadly and often swept the beach with a very storm of shells. Carrying the injured to the boats was a grim task, and the way to the ships from the beach was anxious and pitiful. In this service the Padre was at his best, and proved so efficient that he was once placed in charge of a ship laden with wounded men, who had to be conveyed from Gallipoli to Mudros. On this mission he had experiences which even at this date it were not well to describe.

But even Gallipoli had its humours. I find, for instance, among the Padre's papers the story of a Jock who became involved in a fierce hand-to-hand struggle with a huge Turk. The Jock for a time seemed to be sore pressed; and a comrade called to him,

"Haud on, I am coming to help you." "Na, na," returned the other, "awa' wi' ye, I am daein' fine. Gang and fin' a Turk o' yer ain." The Gallipoli adventure ought never to pass from the memory of a grateful nation. For never did men display more courage, Englishmen, Australians, and Scots alike, than was shown on the bleak slopes of Gallipoli. As we think of it all we appreciate the spirit of Campbell's lines:

> "Let us think of those that sleep,
> Full many a fathom deep,
> By thy wild and stormy steep,
> Elsinore."

Colonel Primrose's service on the Peninsula was brought to an end by a severe attack of dysentery, which kept him for a time prostrate in hospital, his plight being rendered worse by anxiety regarding his son, Clifford, who was also then severely wounded. The physicians who attended the Padre at this time were amazed by the splendid physique which their examination revealed, as well as by his astonishing power of rapid recuperation. It has sometimes been supposed that this illness sowed the seeds of that malignant

disease which finally ended his life. But this idea is mainly conjectural; for he returned from Gallipoli, after his recovery, full of vitality and force. During his leave he came to see a friend, and was then absolutely confident as to the success of the battle of the Peninsula, as well as completely assured of its justification as a military move. Strangely enough, after he had left his friend he saw on the newspaper placards the news that our troops had been withdrawn from Gallipoli, news which shocked him to the uttermost. Indeed, he retained to the end the belief that the retiral from that scene of heroic sacrifice had been a great mistake.

It was probably during this furlough that he resigned the charge of Erskine Church, in which he had achieved so much success. We have already noted that the membership of the congregation had increased from 200 to 450; and this appears to us a great gain, especially when we remember that so many forces were against him in Stirling and when we consider that his service there before the war was less than five years in length. It cannot be said that when he severed his

connection with this congregation and this pleasant town he suffered any poignant sorrow. He was singularly free at all times from any temptation to regret the past. " Not in vain the future beckons; forward, forward let us range " was always his sentiment. When he left a field of triumph he left it more in hope than in sorrow. " Well, that's that," might have expressed his mood. Moreover, when he laid down finally the care of Erskine Church his heart was possessed with love of his other and wider charge among the men who were manning the trenches and holding the field. Certainly, if the choice lay between his pastorate at home and his chaplaincy abroad he could not hesitate a moment in his decision. His present duty was clear and compelling; and when his leave was ended he returned to the colours with joyous alacrity.

While he was enjoying periods at home during the earlier part of the war he, as we have seen, more than once accompanied the Marquis of Graham in recruiting campaigns throughout Scotland. He had often in former days sailed with the Marquis in hotly-

contested races; so it was not as strangers that the two now scoured the country in the Padre's little car. It was, no doubt, a new kind of adventure, to go from place to place and endeavour by efforts of oratory to convince men of their duty to the King, Navy, Army, and the Empire. This was, of course, before the period of conscription, and in those days much labour had to be spent by men like the Marquis of Graham and his Chaplain in stirring up the thoughtless and in arguing with the reluctant, in the interests of national defence. No doubt, the Duke of Montrose could tell many tales of these exploits. Certainly, the Duke's letters to the Padre in after days express much kindliness and friendly attachment.

After this the Chaplain served, some time and somewhere, in France, whither the Naval Division had gone after leaving Gallipoli. Of this period I have no record. But a medical man who met him at that time witnesses that he was extremely popular and respected among the men, who listened to his Sunday addresses with an attention not generally given to a chaplain's discourse.

After some time, however, the authorities seem to have thought that the Padre, at his age, would be best employed in service at home. Accordingly, he was recalled from France and appointed to the oversight of naval camps, first at Blanford in England and afterwards in Scotland near Bridge of Allan. Among his papers are found expressions of appreciation and gratitude from sailors who had been under his care in Blanford, as well as from soldiers in the Scottish camp. In this latter, he found a distinguished literary man who was being set to work in the kitchen; and he was able to bring to the notice of the General this case, with the result that the man was transferred to a task that suited him better than the boiling of potatoes and the scouring of pots and pans. One suspects that there were many tragic instances during the war of men surrendering high places and enlisting as privates with enthusiasm, and dreams of adventure and achievement; only to find themselves allotted duties for which they were in no wise fitted, and left, forgotten, to eat their hearts out in the tame life of home

service. In the estimation of military authorities privates are just privates, and no provision is possible for the best use being made of exceptional men. Had a Shakespeare been among them he might have been set to wash pans; had a "mute, inglorious Milton" enlisted, as likely as not, he would have been forced to learn by practical experience that "they also serve who only stand and wait."

The Padre was in charge of the soldiers at Bridge of Allan when he was called to face one of the most trying incidents in his life. A public meeting in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, had been arranged by the United Free Church. At this meeting Lord Strathclyde was to speak, and Colonel Primrose had promised to give an address on "The Church and the War." He was just setting out to fulfil this engagement when he received a telegram announcing that his son Walter, the youngest of the four that were on service, had been killed by the crashing of an aeroplane. What this must have meant to a man of such intense family attachments as the Padre may be imagined. He proceeded to the meeting, however, and

delivered his address with more than his usual power. In introducing him, Lord Strathclyde said he had "never been more proud of his cousin" than he was that night and that if the audience shared his knowledge of the circumstances they would understand his pride in Colonel Primrose. No doubt this announcement greatly increased the profound impression which the Padre's speech had made. For this brave achievement he never claimed any credit; "he had only acted as many others had done" in these heroic days. But those who know what an emotional man Robert was, how ready his eyes were to fill with tears and his voice to tremble under a burden of feeling, and the degree of resolution that is required of anyone who has to address an audience in an hour of deep sorrow, will recognise that in delivering this St. Andrew's Hall speech without betraying any sign of weakness or hesitation, he displayed a quite unusual degree of devotion to duty and of stern self-control.

This happened on the 27th of February, 1917; and Colonel Primrose continued in his military charge for nearly two years there-

after. For it was not till a good many months subsequent to the Armistice that the work of demobilising the military camps was completed and the chaplains were set free.

The end of the war closed another scene in the Padre's life. It was not the last scene in the play; for more work was yet to be done by him and more adventures undertaken; but the time of service with the troops was probably the period that he looked back upon with the most satisfaction. His pastoral work at the front and in camp had given freer scope to his special powers than had ever been granted him in times of peace, and the dangers he had faced in war had been of a kind that he really loved. He had been "ever a fighter," and one may suspect that, had it been possible, he would rather have been a soldier than a padre. In any case, the perils of shot and shell were more to his taste than the cares and anxieties and trivial harassments which beset the work of a minister, however popular he may be. A congregation always contains some difficult people whose opposition and criticism and petty controversies are perpetually wearing

to heart and brain: and the prospects of a pastor, as he confronts old age, are seldom cheerful. Indeed, the Padre was so conscious of this that on his return to the ways of peace he was for a time determined that he would never again undertake ministerial duty. In those days he used at times to paint radiant pictures of devoting himself henceforward to a life of retired ease wherein elders and deacons should hold no place. He would cultivate his garden, would dig and sow and pluck flowers, would enjoy the society of wife and family and friends and let the world go by. One always listened to his expounding of these bright dreams, however, with scepticism. Robert in the rôle of a gardener and small farmer was not imaginable. His love of the pulpit was too great, his joy in facing an audience too vivid, to render credible these idyllic visions of easeful, horticultural years.

The mention of his family suggests a brief account of their position at this time. Of his three daughters, Annie and Mary had been happily married earlier, and the youngest, Catherine, was married in 1921.

His surviving sons were, with one exception, taking up their old places in civil life. The exception mentioned was Harold, his eldest son, who remained in the Air Force. Harold had enlisted in the infantry when the war began, but he had shortly been wounded and had thereafter secured transference to the Flying Force. In this service he soon proved his aptitude; for he was promoted so rapidly that he became commander of a squadron in Egypt, and later of the Air Force which accompanied Allenby's army in its famous advance through Palestine. When the war ended he was in Egypt and held high office there. Afterwards, he passed stirring days in Mesopotamia, and is now a staff officer in the R.A.F. with the rank of Group Captain.

Clifford's war service had also been adventurous and responsible, for he commanded the ships of the Nelson Battalion in the Naval Division, in the Near East and in Chinese waters. After the war he retained his membership of the Clyde Division, R.N.V.R., and as we have seen, became head of it when the Duke of Montrose retired. The other son who survived war service, John, was a lieu-

tenant in the Navy, and his was also a hard part; for the fleet spent months of exposure and peril, scouring the North Sea and keeping at bay the German ships. This accounts for all Robert's sons who were of military age when the war broke out or became so while the struggle lasted. The second son, James, would fain have enlisted too, but Clifford as a member of the R.N.V.R. was, like his father, called to the colours with his division, and James had no choice but to remain at home in charge of their business, a hard but unavoidable lot.

Altogether, the Padre had reason to be proud of his sons and the service they rendered to the cause of British freedom. They all had something of the spirit of their sire; the temper in which he did his duty as chaplain was akin to that which they displayed in service on sea, in the air, and on shore.

CHAPTER X

LAST YEARS

The Padre's expectation of a retired life, spent in his garden and among his kindred, did not long survive. For we soon began to hear of his preaching here and there; and after a few years he accepted an invitation to take charge for six months of the Presbyterian Church in Valparaiso. This was far from a fulfilment of his forecast of restful years. A voyage of 9000 miles can hardly be described as rest, nor does charge of a congregation of a type which the Padre had never known before seem consonant with ideals of withdrawal from public speech and the ceasing of all pastoral cares. In fact the Valparaiso adventure showed clearly that Robert Primrose was still the man he had been of old.

There does not remain much record of his service in the fair city of South America. But there is enough to prove that the old power of attractive preaching and of personal ministration remained undiminished. He pursued his course of duty in the southern city in a spirit that was altogether harmonious with its sunny skies, cheerful, hopeful, intensely interested in all sorts and conditions of men. We have many testimonies as to his personal popularity and as to the help his Sunday services gave to men and women in their daily business. One regular attender of the church in Valparaiso wrote to him: "You always said something that helped us throughout the week." He certainly received great kindness in the South American town, and he liked the people there. Their ways were not Scottish ways; but the Padre was never critical of different types of people nor judged them by one rigid standard. He adapted himself readily to his surroundings and regarded the members of all his congregations everywhere as essentially lovable. The people in Valparaiso were anxious to retain his services; but the lure of country

and home and old association prevailed, and at the end of the appointed time he returned to Scotland.

But this was not the end of his ministerial experience; for he had occasion one day while on holiday to preach in Springfield Church, Bishopbriggs, and, though he conducted service there in unconventional attire, the congregation shortly thereafter gave him a unanimous call to be their minister. This invitation he accepted, and was inducted to the charge in 1921. Thus the Padre, now in the 'sixties, took up the familiar burden again, and he did so with the old cheerful willingness. He was, indeed, then conscious of no waning of energy. His love of the pulpit and of the platform was undiminished. He was a better preacher now than when, in the flower of youth, he had been ordained. His thought was richer than of old, his style matured, and his mastery of the speaker's art perfected. Also, let it be said, he was almost as impulsive as ever, as masterful, as impatient of restraint. Due appreciation of this latter trait was shown by a worthy who, on being informed that some people proposed to

remonstrate with the minister, to tell him something that he might not wish to hear, said, " Chaps me no' to be the man that tells him."

To relate at length the story of the Bishopbriggs ministry would merely be to repeat the tale of his former pastorates. It would be to strike again the old notes of rapid achievement, increasing membership, personal and pulpit popularity, renovation of church buildings, installation of an organ, and so on. I remember hearing him during his time in Bishopbriggs deliver a lecture on the religious teaching of a well-known poet; and I have seldom heard him give a more admirable address. It was in perfect taste, skilful in exposition, and superbly delivered. It is hard to realise now that the voice and personality of the speaker were within two years to pass " to where beyond these voices there is peace."

While the Padre was minister of Springfield Church he had surplus energy enough to deliver lectures in St. Andrew's Hall, Glasgow, which seemed to renew memories of Burnbank days; the audiences were as

large, the speaking as masterly, and the impression made as undeniable.

In this his last charge the Padre was back once more in the midst of a community something like that in which he had begun his work; for though Bishopbriggs had become a part of Glasgow it had been until of late a village, and the scenery surrounding it resembled that which lay about Cumbernauld, pastoral and peaceful. So it may be said that, in a sense, it was true of Robert's ministry that "the end was as the beginning."

At this point it occurs to me that some readers may regard the foregoing narrative as a somewhat monotonous repetition of the same tale, a tale of successive victories which is wearying in its sameness, which would be greatly relieved by the occasional record of a failure or a defeat. But if this be so, it is the fault of the facts, not of the narrator. A biographer is not a writer of fiction and cannot be expected to invent fictitious episodes, merely for the sake of artistic variety, or to describe defeats which never occurred. Of course, the Padre had his share of the troubles which beset all ministries. Just as he was

sometimes defeated in trials of strength and in the racing of a yacht, so he occasionally in his pastoral work encountered persons whom he could neither overawe nor persuade; he was sometimes constrained to modify his methods, and his efforts to secure peace in families did not always succeed. Also, his style of preaching did not suit every congregation, and he had not seldom times of discouragement and weariness. Still, it remains true that every pastorate which he undertook ended in a state of health and vigour, and that the various stages of his career bore almost equal marks of success and power.

The end of the Bishopbriggs ministry, however, was brought about by his showing signs of approaching weariness. As years went by it became increasingly evident to his family that the constant care and attention demanded by the holding of a fixed charge was telling on his powers. He was often unduly depressed and exhausted after the Sunday's work, and small things troubled him as they had not done of old; in short, there were many things that indicated an

overwrought nervous system, and the issue was that, on medical advice, he resigned his pastorate in 1926. In addressing his people for the last time, he said that he would have a sad heart that day if he thought he was bidding good-bye to the pulpit: he hoped to be able for much preaching in days to come. On that occasion he chose for his text, " I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me," and his sermon made clear his faithful adherence to the essentials of the Evangelical faith. A writer in the local press, in reviewing the Padre's ministry, spoke of his kindliness and courtesy, his powers of oratory, and his gift of speaking " a word in season to him that is weary," his unwearied patience in pastoral work, his astonishing skill in composing domestic difficulties, his tenderness when he was called to convey to any household news of bereavement or serious affliction, and " the many things of weight, worth, and beauty " which he left behind him as the fruit of his service and labour of love.

The Padre's confidence that in leaving Bishopbriggs he was not deserting the pulpit

proved to be well founded, for, during the ensuing year, he was in constant request as a preacher, and in the early summer of 1927 he accepted an invitation to minister for four months in the Parish Church of Partick, where the late Dr. John Smith had served so long and ably. This engagement he fulfilled with such conspicuous success that the congregation would probably have sought to retain him as their permanent pastor, had this been possible. There is abundant testimony that in the conduct of worship in Partick Church he was at his best. Never had he commanded larger or more appreciative audiences, never had he seemed more vigorous in delivery, than during this closing season of his long and strenuous life.

It must be understood that when he resigned his charge in 1926 his fatigue was of a purely nervous kind and that he retained abundant muscular vigour. Indeed, the physical energy he displayed that summer was amazing. For instance, one day while he was staying at Ardentinny a party of travellers arrived at the shore after the ferry-boat had set out to the waiting steamer, and

the Padre actually rowed them out himself to the vessel, in the teeth of a strong wind and sea. One recalls also the story of another day when he motored from Ardentinny to Kirn, there took the steamer to Gourock and the train to Glasgow, passed the whole afternoon in visiting his friends and relations in the city, travelled back to Ardentinny in the evening, and had energy left for a swim in Loch Long before going to bed. Also, in the course of that summer he sailed in many races, and experienced aboard the yacht of the Duke of Montrose, as well as in those of many other friends, the joys of the steersman. Finally, he was this season made Chaplain of the Royal Mudhook Yacht Club, a thing which gave him great satisfaction.

But the next summer, that of 1927, was one which, in the memory of Robert's friends, is deeply touched with pathos. The Sunday's work was often succeeded by days of prostration and pain, the shadows of advancing decline; though it is true that he revived from these attacks, and seemed not seldom to regain his ancient vigour and joy of life.

One day in the August of that year I had my last long talk with him. We sat on the shore not far from Ardentinny. The wind was blowing in from Loch Long, the waves were breaking cheerfully on the beach, and we spoke of old days spent together on the waters of the beloved Firth; bright and stirring days when the world seemed young, and the rushing of the sail-boat through the sea made joyous music, when a heavy squall was met with "frolic welcome." We spoke also, I remember, of old friends whose memories haunt these shores. We had no premonition, that day, that ere the suns of another summer shone on the Firth of Clyde, Robert would have become one of the most dearly cherished of these traditions, his personality one of the most vivid memories that throng the phantom years. How little the Padre realised his weakness at this time was proved by the fact that he was then regarding with a favourable eye a movement, which had been initiated by the Duke of Montrose, to secure his services as travelling lecturer and speaker for the Scottish Lifeboat Association. This friendly purpose of the Duke was fulfilled in

the late autumn of 1927, when Robert was actually appointed to this post. He was then suffering under a burden of pain, sickness, and debility, but his optimistic temperament enabled him to see in these things only a passing cloud; and he accepted the offered post. The gallantry of this acceptance is evident: for the work involved was sure to be laborious, and any man close to seventy years of age might have hesitated to accept the burden, even though he had possessed a full measure of health and strength. Many of us were very dubious about this matter: but Robert was Robert still, and he of course had his way. But he had for once failed to reckon with the power of time and disease to thwart the most gallant spirit. In any case, when I last saw him in November 1927 he looked very ill. True, he was still able to drive his car and to undertake journeys in the service of friends and family; but his frame had shrunk piteously and he had lost much of his old buoyancy. The New Year found him much weaker; though our hopes were often raised, as the X-rays, time after time, failed to reveal any serious trouble. It

was, I think, in February 1928 that he spent some weeks in a nursing home in Glasgow, being kept under observation. When he was driven to Glasgow on his last visit it is told that, on descending from the motor, he made a pathetic endeavour to walk with his old and decided steps; a proof, this, that the old spirit still dwelt in the failing frame. When he went home to his bungalow at Torrance of Campsie he seemed a little better; but it was not long after this that examination revealed the development of serious disease, and thereafter decline was swift and continuous.

It had sometimes been said of Robert in the days of his vigour that he required to be always succeeding, and could not fight a losing battle. But he showed in this last phase that he could indeed fight a losing battle with patience, courage, and gentleness. His appreciation of the tender care given him by his wife and of the love of his children was a very moving thing. As to his sufferings, he made little of them and did not care to speak of them. "Robin," said one of his sisters to him, "have you suffered very

much?" "Yes," he replied, "I have suffered a good deal, but"—with a characteristic, impatient gesture of his hand he seemed to cast the matter out of his mind. He was still determined after his lifelong custom to forget the things that were behind and to press forward to those that were before. He was true also to his accustomed habit of talking little about his religious emotions and beliefs. As to all other matters, he had ever been demonstrative, impulsive, swift to utter himself. But, as to the deep experiences of the spirit, he always shrank from speech. In this respect he seemed to have the spirit of his hero, Carlyle, who wrote:

> "What boots it to stand and to talk?
> I have a journey to go ere night,
> I must shoulder my wallet and walk."

In any case, he entered the valley making no sign, and of his last hours it is to be said "the rest is silence." The date of his death was 16th April, 1928.

In reviewing this brief account of a busy and crowded life, I see no reason to delete anything, though much might have been added to the story. We must reckon Robert

Primrose's life to have been a happy one, filled with service and with joy. Our friend was one who attempted nothing that was beyond his powers, nor undertook any task that involved his straying outside the limits prescribed to him by gift and circumstance. It was a life altogether wholesome and according to nature, yet possessing an underlying strain of deep religious faith; rejoicing in the sunshine and the gladness of the world, yet having vision of "The light that never was on sea or land." It was the life of one who used the gifts he had to the uttermost and to the best. The heights of his achievement were not indeed of Alpine altitudes, such as are climbed by the great and famous, but rather on the scale of his own Scottish hills, comparatively unimposing, yet still hard to conquer; but he ascended them with joy and unfailing hope. In his experience there were "gorgeous palaces" of dreams and enjoyment, and also "solemn temples" of worship. He fulfilled an ample measure of years, and was surrounded in the end by

> "That which should accompany old age,
> As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends."

And he was happy in the opportunity of his death, for he was spared that which would have been to him a sore trial, long years of weakness and disability. He was content to spend his life in the simple service of his own Church and country; and it cannot be said that in this he ever failed in duty. If at the end he had experience of the clouds and darkness that are about the throne of death, he faced them, as he had done so often in Flanders and Gallipoli, gallantly, unafraid. One can never think of Robert as having really passed away. He remains part of our experience; somewhere he is at work, and walks abroad in sunlight.

"My sprightly neighbour gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet as heretofore
Some Summer morning?"

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY ROBERT MACLEHOSE AND CO. LTD.
THE UNIVERSITY PRESS, GLASGOW.

EDIN. PUBL. LIBR. ACC. 65017 CL. XBR534 P LIB. R PR. T|R VEND. 290

EDINBURGH
PUBLIC
LIBRARIES